



IN TOUCH

Depletion and Depression

Here's a picture of a common EAP client with a frequently heard issue. Tony consults with his EAP professional, having taken an hour out of his 10-hour day spent in a windowless office, juggling figures on the computer. He works four 10-hour days a week and has a partner who also works a full-time-plus job. Between them, they have two or three children under the age of seven. Tony doesn't get enough sleep, rarely takes personal time and has stopped doing most of the enjoyable, relaxing or stimulating things that used to bring joy earlier in life. There is simply no time.

Tony feels "tired all the time," has lost vigor and feels overwhelmed by demands that used to be taken in stride. Tony is depleted and depressed. Depletion Depression is a subspecies of depression that comes when one has worn one's self out, both literally and figuratively. It is an emotional, chemical, physical and perhaps even spiritual event. It is very common in people who spend all their time and energy "putting out" and not enough "taking in." Endocrinologists talk in terms of adrenal exhaustion. A human resource specialist might talk about burnout. It's all about overtaxing our personal resources.

Just as soil or any other natural resource can be depleted, so can human energy or emotional resilience. We overwork and undernourish ourselves at our own peril. Tony seeks help, asking "What's wrong with me?" The answer is at once simple and complex. Depression, or a tendency toward it, can be inherited to some extent. It can be a result of a complex bio-chemical imbalance. It can be triggered by loss. It can also come as a result of personal depletion.

Nutritionists have spent years developing their understanding of the building blocks of sound nutrition. We all know, whether we follow them or not, the general rules for good nutrition: complex carbohydrates, plenty of fruits and veggies, watch the caffeine, etc. Most of us have a pretty clear if general idea of what can happen if we depart too radically from healthful eating habits. Years of research on emotional well-being has also taught us much about the building blocks of emotional wellness and prevention of emotional depletion. Emotional self-care is the best defense against depletion depression. Time spent in solitude, quality time with significant others, time spent engaged in meaningful activities, adequate rest and exercise—all of these give the human being (body, mind and spirit) the raw materials it needs to thrive emotionally. Knowing is one thing. Doing is often harder in our complex, fast-paced lives.

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Helping people lead healthier lives

Depletion and Depression, cont.

When Tony seeks help from me, his EAP professional, part of my job is diagnosis: What is the problem requiring attention? Sometimes a diagnosis of depression may lead to a physician for a prescription for one of the new and excellent antidepressants. Sometimes, however, if the problem seems to be stemming from depletion, the answer may be a thorough reassessment of priorities and lead to a journey to get one's life back into balance.

To Medicate or Not to Medicate – one mental health professional's (brief) thoughts on an ongoing debate. Depression is one of the most common presenting complaints among EAP clients. Often the question is raised: Should I try one of those meds everyone seems to be taking? Most research seems to indicate that for clinical depression, a combination of counseling and medication is most helpful over the long term. Whether or not to take medication is a personal choice. Some people are comfortable taking pills to feel better; others prefer to do it another way. While the prescription of drugs is not within the professional expertise of non-medical practitioners, here is one way of thinking about it. There is no question that there are activities that can make people feel better. We know that aerobic exercise enhances the production of endorphins and can help people feel better emotionally. We also know that if people regularly engage in pleasurable activities, they are less likely to feel depressed. We know that for some people, a good cry alone or with a friend, can help eliminate an emotional blue spell.

When working with a person who feels depressed, I ask the following questions: **1)** Can you make a list of things, people or actions that usually make you feel good? Some people have long lists of pleasurable events and actions. Some people have shorter lists. Some have a hard time coming up with even one pleasurable activity.

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2) Can you decide to start doing some of these things again? Can you get yourself out the door to walk four or five times a week? Can you get yourself to call that friend you haven't seen in awhile? **3)** If the person cannot come up with a list, or is so immobilized that he cannot get himself to do any of the things, then I start to think about referral for medication. **4)** If the person is able to get himself to do some of the previously pleasurable activities, ideally at least once a day, and yet experiences no improvement in mood state, then it may be time to consult with a physician or psychiatrist.

If you feel you might be suffering from depression or depression depletion, please contact your EAP professional for assistance with tackling this common issue.

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Handling Holiday Debt

If you are feeling overwhelmed by the holiday bills that just arrived, develop a plan for paying your debts, and you'll feel back in control. Experts suggest that you pay off the credit card with the highest interest rate first, regardless of the balance. But if paying off another credit card with a low balance gives you a feeling of success quickly, go for it. The bit of extra interest you pay might be worth it. Otherwise, pay as much as you can each month to the card with the highest interest rate, and pay the minimum on the others. Once you have paid the full balance on the first card, continue this plan with the other cards on your list. Here's a creative solution from finance guru Ric Edelman: To reduce the temptation of using credit cards, place them in a big plastic cup of water and freeze it. Should you have the urge to use your credit card, you may change your mind by the time it thaws out.

Is That...Sexual Harassment?

Can you interact with a fellow worker and make polite comments about their dress, what they did over the week-end, or even participate in mildly flirtatious interactions without having to worry about such acts constituting sexual harassment? Before taking the first step, think and ask yourself: “Would a reasonable person object to this?” After this consideration, three rules eliminate most chances of something you say or do being sexual harassment:

- 1) Use common courtesy and common sense.
- 2) Pay close attention to a person’s reaction to what you say and do.
- 3) If it appears unwelcome, don’t do it again. Know your organization’s policy on sexual harassment.

Wise Moves for Night Owls

If you have been a shift worker for awhile, you have probably discovered ways to balance your work and personal life. No one has to tell you that your stress is unique. If you are new to shift work, it is important to know that adapting to night work while keeping a harmonious personal life is possible, but it takes a conscious effort to achieve your goal. Whether you are new to shift work or not, consider whether the following five life-stress warning signs are occurring or continuing:

- 1) Since starting shift work, a family member complains that “everything” is now on his or her shoulders.
- 2) You continually feel “guilty” about your job and its impact on your family.
- 3) You are drinking in the morning after getting off from work with the following rationale, “This is like coming home from a day job and having a drink.”
- 4) You are not able to sleep, and those in your home, “don’t care.”
- 5) You are still waiting for quality time with family members to happen naturally.

Consider your EAP as a source for trouble-shooting these and other night-shift issues.

Attitudes

All of us have occasional fluctuations in attitude. That’s life. But are you often cynical, pessimistic, and sarcastic at work? Have others complained? Attitudes are like colds. They’re catching. They can dampen morale and negatively affect productivity. A bad attitude may be a coping strategy to manage anger, depression, or disappointments. If your attitude is causing problems in your work or personal life, find out what remedies your EAP professional can offer.

Using Your EAP

Question: I don’t have a personal problem, I just want to talk with the EAP professional about some career decisions I am facing. Is the EAP appropriate for me?

Answer: Yes! EAPs are for any personal concern you would like to discuss in confidence. In a discussion with the EAP professional, you may discover the answer to a question that has eluded you. If not, the EAP professional can assist you in taking the next step to find the answer you seek. You don’t have to be in crisis with a substance abuse problem, marital difficulties, financial issues, or have a mental health problem to use your EAP. If the issue is important to you, and you want confidential help, your EAP is available.

Question: If I use my EAP, can it negatively affect my job or career?

Answer: No! Organizations that establish employee assistance programs make commitments to their employees that prohibit any negative effect on an employee’s career or job solely for participating in an EAP. This is fundamental to an EAP’s success. This prohibition includes adversely affecting promotional opportunities, job security, advancement, performance evaluations, assignments, or other factors that affect financial or position status.

Work and Family Balance

Achieving work and family balance is an ongoing process of juggling responsibilities at work and the needs of family. One key to success is periodically stepping back and analyzing how things are going. Then, make adjustments where possible. Consider these other keys:

Work and family balance is a conscious decision. It doesn't happen automatically. Understanding this can reduce frustration when you experience temporary setbacks.

Write down family goals. Family needs change over time. Opportunities to build a tree house for the kids or experience a new family pastime don't last forever. Decide what is important, write it down, and commit to making certain goals "absolutely happen."

Manage distraction and procrastination. Working long hours causes stress that sometimes finds relief naturally through workplace distractions and

procrastination. If you are at the office for twelve hours, do you really work only ten? If you are searching for more family time, it might be found here.

Discuss family expectations and responsibilities. When one family member is taking on too many responsibilities at home, resentments can build. Periodically, discuss family needs to gain the awareness needed to consider choices for work and family balance.

Be careful about justifying an imbalance. At times, it is realistic for family members to recognize that your job needs to take priority. Use this rationale with caution so it doesn't become a habit.

**To Speak with an EAP Professional,
please call
800.765.0770**